



# BIRDING 101

**Bird watching is a specialized activity requiring a significant amount of background knowledge - and a whole lot of patience! That is why we would like to provide the following information to assist you in jump-starting your bird-watching activities:**

## **GETTING STARTED**

- Before you head out for a birding activity, you may wish to consider gathering:
  - A Notebook and Pencil(s) for Taking Notes
  - Pair of Binoculars or Spotting Scope
  - A Birding Field Guide
  - Comfortable, Layered Clothing in Natural Colors
  - Sunscreen, Water, Closed-Toed Shoes and a Hat
- You may wish to purchase the booklet, *Birds of Shoreline*, available for sale (\$5.00 each), with proceeds benefiting the Friends of 'R' House. The booklet includes basic information on the topography of a bird, outlining the identification, range, special habits/food, and nesting habits of the most common species at Shoreline.
- Other popular and well-respected field guides include (but are not limited to) *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America*, *National Geographic Field Guide to Birds of Western North America*, and *Birds of Northern California*.
- Call your local Audubon Society office to learn of docent-led walks that are taking place, or inquire regarding upcoming Environmental Docent walks at Shoreline!
- For more advanced birder resource information and tips, visit [Sialia.com](http://Sialia.com), Bay Area Bird Blog or other local bird-watching notification services. Read about and learn from others about areas where specific species have been identified. Then, visit the places where specific species have been spotted to add that bird to your own bird list!

## **OUT IN THE FIELD**

- Start with a knowledge that field guides are organized according to taxonomy (i.e. the science of classifying organisms and breaking them down into seven major divisions, including Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus and Species).
- Recognize that birds and animals depend upon their physical features to help them obtain food, keep safe, build homes, withstand weather and attract mates. The shape of a bird's beak, foot size and field markings all help them survive.
- Write down or memorize your bird observations before looking it up in a field guide. This is because the bird will likely fly away before you get to the right page!
- When preparing to identify a bird, ask yourself the following questions:
  - 1) What is the bird's size and color?
  - 2) What is the shape of the bill, wings and tail?
  - 3) Is the bird making a distinctive sound?
  - 4) What unusual bird behavior am I observing?
  - 5) What type of habitat is the bird in?
  - 6) What is my geographic location?
  - 7) What time of day is it?
  - 8) What is the time of year?
- When judging a bird's size, note how small or large it is in relation to nearby objects (i.e. plants, rocks, trees, etc.). Consider that large items influence one's perception.
- When observing behavior, bear in mind that the more you pay attention to what birds do, the easier you will enjoy and understand each distinct species. For example: birds near water have different swimming, diving and feeding activities; birds on land can be seen head bobbing, wing-flicking and tail-fanning; birds in flight have different patterns of soaring, diving, flying in groups and formations, etc.
- When viewing a bird's shape and posture, consider whether it has: a slender or stocky body; horizontal or vertical orientation; combs, crests, shields or plumes on its head; a short, long or arched neck; different types of bills serving different purposes; short or long legs; varying foot shapes; long/narrow or broad/rounded wings; fan-shaped, forked, square-tipped and/or other type of tails.
- When recording a bird's color and markings, remember that lighting conditions can affect an observation. In addition, while some birds are entirely one color, others can have patterned crowns, eyelines, throats, breast, wing bars, rumps, and outer tail feathers. The upperparts or underparts may be streaked, spotted or barred.
- There are approximately 1,900 bird species in North America, and twenty different orders of birds that can be found in the West. Have patience! And remember to slow down and be quiet, so you don't scare away the birds!

## **TO GET INVOLVED AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL DOCENT**

- If you found this information helpful and wish to receive additional training and exposure to the Shoreline at Mountain View environment, please call (650) 903-6073 to express your interest in joining the Environmental Docent volunteer program!